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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ELECTION INTERFERENCE FEARS IN COUNTRYSIDE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: While political leaders acknowledge that the restrictions in expression in Turkey's Southeast have generally loosened, villagers remain concerned that their voices will not be heard in Ankara. Based on conversations with politicians, business leaders, and NGO representatives, several social divides appear to strongly influence the outcome of the upcoming vote in Southeast Turkey. Urban-rural differences couple with ethnic divides, most likely resulting in DEHAP and AK being the big regional winners. Interference by local jandarma and village guards, as well as the effect of the baraj, could significantly influence the region's parliamentary representation. However, human rights organizations and DEHAP officials report significantly less interference in pro-Kurdish political expression compared to elections in 1995 and 1999. END SUMMARY.

WILL DEHAP SWEEP THE SOUTHEAST?

2. (SBU) Though no reliable figures exist for ethnic population statistics, estimates suggest approximately 15 million Turkish citizens of Kurdish descent living in Turkey's Southeast. A large number of these Kurds plan to vote for DEHAP (Democratic People's Party), the successor party to HADEP. In an October 15 decision, DEHAP got a green light for participation in the upcoming elections. Election preparations continue apace. Many small villages in the region boast only one party office, DEHAP's. In larger towns and cities throughout the Southeast, DEHAP leaders believe they are poised to take a considerable portion of the vote.

3. (SBU) Several obstacles exist to DEHAP entering parliament. First, and most significant for Turkish political development, DEHAP is being intentionally hampered, often by jandarma and village guards. These allegations come from Diyarbakir and Mardin human rights advocates, as well as DEHAP leaders throughout the Southeast. DEHAP members are regularly harassed by jandarma and security officials, including verbal threats, arbitrary arrest at rallies, and detention at checkpoints (in one case, a group of DEHAP leaders from Diyarbakir was detained for seven hours at a checkpoint in Sirnak without any explanation, according to DEHAP Sirnak Chairman Resul Sadak).

4. (SBU) Security forces also regularly harass villagers they believe are sympathetic to DEHAP. Mazlum-Der, Human Rights Association (HRA) and DEHAP officials throughout the region report cases of jandarma and village guards threatening villagers not to vote for DEHAP. The villagers are warned that, should DEHAP win the vote from that area, the town may be burned, re-evacuated, or denied services (such as electricity or water). Diyarbakir's HRA also reports one case in which a village was told by jandarma, if they really wanted to show their support for DEHAP, that was fine, but only one person, the village sheikh, should vote symbolically on behalf of the whole village. Of course, in reality, the vote would only count for one vote, not hundreds. Ultimately, DEHAP is most concerned that these same security officials will be ensuring the sanctity of the ballot box. DEHAP fully expects vote tampering to take place.

AK IS AN URBAN PHENOMENON

5. (SBU) AK is, by all current estimations, leading the polls throughout Turkey. In the Southeast, this popularity, while significant, is largely confined to larger urban centers. Only in Diyarbakir and Gaziantep

does AK currently expect to lead the pack, with DEHAP also getting a strong showing. In smaller cities such as Mardin (where DEHAP and ANAP seem, currently, to be running first and second) and Hakkari, AK barely shows up on the radar. In fact, though socially very conservative, leaders throughout the region seem vastly more concerned with security and ethnic issues rather than the possible impact of an Islamically-minded party.

THE BARAJ IS CRUCIAL

16. (SBU) What does this mean for a future Turkish parliament? If DEHAP takes ten percent of the national vote, the number of parliament seats per party will come close to the Southeast popular vote. If, however, DEHAP does not make the cutoff, huge sections of the region will be unrepresented. Diyarbakir's AK Parti leader, Nezir Koclardan, admits as much. Though he believes AK will take only 30 percent of the popular vote, he expects this to yield seven of Diyarbakir's ten seats, betting that DEHAP, though beating them locally, will not cross the national threshold. In Sirnak, where DEHAP believes it can muster 70 percent of the total vote, ANAP could benefit enormously. ANAP, which has historically had strong backing in Sirnak, could reap windfall parliamentary seats should DEHAP not clear the baraj. If neither party crosses the baraj, however, a small fraction of the popular vote (as little as 15 percent) could take all the province's seats.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Despite a seemingly endless list of grievances, Kurdish leaders freely admit that the situation in the region is more accepting of DEHAP (previously HADEP) than at any time in the past. Registering the party and its candidates is done freely throughout the region. Party headquarters are opened with minimal interference. Rallies often are given permission by the local governor. However, local security officials, acting on their own authority, frequently seek to dampen enthusiasm for DEHAP. Crossing the critical ten percent baraj will be a tight squeeze for DEHAP, but would result in a very different TBMM. In such a tight contest, piecemeal interference by local officials could thus have significant national impact. End comment.

Holtz